

England — Churches, etc — Baptists —

Northamptonshire Association.



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T H E  
CIRCULAR LETTER,

FROM THE

BAPTIST MINISTERS *and* MESSENGERS;

Maintaining the important Doctrines of Three equal Persons in the GODHEAD; eternal and personal Election; the original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind; particular Redemption; free Justification, by the imputed Righteousness of CHRIST; efficacious Grace in Regeneration: the Perseverance of the Saints in Grace to Glory; and professing the primitive Order and Discipline of Churches: Assembled at *Northampton, June 1st and 2d, 1773.*

To the several Churches of CHRIST whom they represent or have received Letters from, meeting at *Nottingham*, and *Sutton-Ashfield* in Nottinghamshire; *Sheepshead, Leicester*; *Sutton* in the Elms, *Armsby*, and *Foxton* in Leicestershire; *Oakham* in Rutlandshire; *Kettering, Walgrave, Northampton*, and *Road* in Northamptonshire; *Oulney* in Bucks; *Carleton* in Bedfordshire, and *St Albans* in Hertfordshire;

Grace be unto you, and Peace from GOD our Father,  
and the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

BELoved BRETHREN;

WE freely, and, we trust, with Thankfulness, acknowledge the Goodness of GOD towards us, shewn in protecting, preserving, and bringing us in Safety to the Place, and at the Time, appointed for our assembling together this Year, and rendering our Meeting pleasant and profitable, and causing Love and Unity to abound amongst us.

BEING met together, after solemn Prayer to GOD for Direction and Assistance, we attended to the Circumstances of the several Churches in this Association, as mentioned

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in their Letters, and endeavoured to spread their Cases before the LORD. It appears, by their Accounts, that in the Year past, the LORD has blessed the Ministry of the Word amongst them; afforded his Presence with them in attending upon his Ordinances; and enabled Some openly to profess his Name and enter into Fellowship with them. And though there are some Things complained of by them of a discouraging Nature, yet, upon the whole, there is great Cause for Thankfulness. And now, Brethren, we unitedly and most sincerely wish to be instrumental in promoting your Edification and Comfort; in order to which we would further proceed, in attempting to explain and improve Gospel-Truths amongst you; and would observe, that the pure and precious Doctrines of the everlasting Gospel, are wisely formed and graciously given, to set forth the Glory of GOD, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; as the one eternal, and immutable JEHOVAH, and the Riches of Free, Sovereign, and eternal Grace, which shine, with peculiar Lustre, in the complete and eternal Salvation of a Number of poor, lost, perishing Sinners. They are suited to encourage the Hope, revive the drooping Spirits, comfort the Hearts, and strengthen the Minds of the Contrite, Weary, and Heavy-laden, and serve to promote real Holiness in Heart and Life. Notwithstanding which, it is evident to every diligent Observer, that Ignorance of their real Worth and Value very much abounds in this Day; and that there is an awful Declension amongst the Professors of them, with respect to that Love, Zeal, and Holiness, which are the genuine Fruits of a powerful and experimental Acquaintance with them. Wherefore, Brethren, as we have Opportunity, we judge it our indispensable Duty to put you in mind of these Things, though ye know them, and are established in the present Truth; and to exhort you to stand fast in one Spirit, with one Mind, striving together for the Faith once delivered to the Saints. And, in order to encourage and animate you to it, we would endeavour to explain, and shew the Importance of those fundamental Doctrines which in our Letter we profess to hold and maintain; some of which we have already attempted to improve in our former Epistles. That which now comes under Consideration,



sideration, is, the great and glorious Doctrine of FREE JUSTIFICATION, by the imputed Righteousness of Christ. A Doctrine this, of the utmost Importance. It eminently displays the Glory of infinite Wisdom, the Riches of eternal Goodness, and the wonderful Condescension of the Son of God. It holds forth Relief to sensible Sinners, and points out to Believers their Title to the heavenly Inheritance. The Limits of our Letter will not admit of a full Discussion of this Truth in its several Branches: We shall therefore, Brethren, only lay before you a few Things respecting it, which we wish you to keep in Mind, and frequently meditate upon. And may the Spirit of Truth guide your Thoughts, increase your Faith, and lead you to that Joy which springs from the Blessing contained in it.

WE would have you, Brethren, consider, what that Justification is, which we are speaking of: It is the Justification of the *Persons* of ungodly Men, before an infinitely pure and holy God, which is defined, by that excellent Divine the late Dr Gill, as “ An Act of God’s free Grace, “ whereby he clears his People from Sin, discharges them “ from Condemnation, and reckons, and accounts them “ Righteous, for the Sake of CHRIST’S Righteousness, which “ he has accepted of, and imputes to them.” Agreeable to which Paul, in his Writings on this Subject, boldly asserts, *It is God that justifieth* (Rom. viii. 33.) and that *freely by his Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ*; Rom. iii. 24. That those whom he justifies are in themselves ungodly, Rom. iv. 5. that he imputes a Righteousness to them, Rom. iv. 6. that they are thereby freed from every Charge, and all Condemnation, are made Righteous, and Heirs according to the Hope of eternal Life, Rom. v. 18, 19. viii. 1, 33. Tit. iii. 7. The free, sovereign, eternal, and everlasting Love of God, appears in this wonderful Affair, with amazing Glory. Its Greatness and glorious Riches are unsearchable. The Views which Believers sometimes have by Faith of it now, yield them unspeakable Delight and Satisfaction, *Isaiah* lxi. 10. And Oh! what inconceivable Joy will eternally fill their Minds, in the bright World of Glory Above, when they shall behold the Face of God in Righteousness!



WE recommend it to you, Brethren, to think much upon that Righteousness for the Sake of which God justifies his People, which is no other, than the Righteousness of our divine and all-glorious Redeemer: not his essential Righteousness, as God, which is incommunicable; but that which, as the Surety of his People, in their Room and Stead, he wrought out and brought in for them, which consists in his fulfilling the Law in all its Requirements. The truly pious and learned Mr *Hervey* says; "By CHRIST's Righteousness, I understand, the whole of his active and passive Obedience, springing from the Holiness of his Heart, continued through the whole Progress of his Life, and extending to the last Pang of his Death." Agreeable to which we read, of being *justified by his Blood*, of being *made Righteous by his Obedience*; and of his being *the End of the Law for Righteousness, to every one that believeth*, Rom. v. 9, 19. x. 4. The Properties of this Righteousness are such, as render it worthy of our Acceptance, and suitable for our Justification before God. It has unparalleled Excellence and infinite Worth, arising from the Dignity and Glory of its Author, who is God manifest in the Flesh: hence it is called, the Righteousness of God. It is infinitely Pure and Holy, perfectly free from any Spot or Stain of Sin. It is large and full, complete and perfect, answerable to all the Demands of Law and Justice. It is every way rich and glorious, and matchless, elevates, adorns, and ennobles all that are clothed with it. It is an everlasting Righteousness; for its Efficacy, Dignity, and Glory, will remain for ever. It is acceptable and well-pleasing to God. By it the *Law is magnified and made honourable*. It is the one and only Righteousness, by which any of *Adam's Race* can be justified in the Sight of God. Some perhaps may object: Doth not the Scripture say, that Men are *justified by Works, and not by Faith only*? True, it doth, *James ii. 24*. but then, it is not to be understood of their Persons before God, but of the Truth and Reality of their Faith, and the Sincerity of their Profession before Men, which is by Works, which are the genuine Fruits of Faith, and which every Believer should be careful to maintain. But the only Righteousness, by which they are justified before God, is the Righteousness of CHRIST; in comparison with which their own Obedience is no better than *filthy Rags*, *Isaiah lxiv, 6*. And as

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*Dross and Dung*, Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9. And therefore insufficient to answer the Requirements of the Law, which speaks to every one who is under it; so that *every Mouth must be stoppt, and the whole World become guilty before God*. Wherefore, *by the Deeds of the Law no Flesh living shall be justified*, Rom. iii. 19, 20. But now the Righteousness of GOD, without the Law, is manifested, even the Righteousness of GOD, which is by Faith of JESUS CHRIST, unto all and upon all that believe, for there is no difference. This is that Righteousness for the Sake of which GOD justifies his People; he imputes it unto them, and accepts of it for them, on the Ground of their Union with CHRIST; in whom they have Righteousness and Strength; in whom they are justified, and shall glory; and by whom they are justified from all Things, from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses, *Isaiah* xlv. 24. *Acts* xiii. 39. This is the only Righteousness, which a Believer desires to make mention of before GOD, and to be found in, in Life, in Death, and at Judgment.

WE further recommend to your Consideration, Brethren, the Manner in which this glorious Blessing is enjoyed: It is by that Faith which is the Gift of GOD. Hence, they, who are said in Scripture to be Partakers of it, are described as Believers in CHRIST, and said to be justified by Faith. Without true Faith no Man can know that he is justified, he cannot see the Glory of CHRIST'S Righteousness, the Benefits springing from it, the Grace of GOD displayed in it, nor enjoy the Comfort of it. They who do are such whose Understandings are enlightened by the Spirit of GOD, to see their lost, perishing Condition, as guilty, condemned Creatures; being utterly unable to fulfil the Law, which they have broken, or satisfy the Demands of it; being in themselves poor, and miserable, blind, and naked. Sensible of this their sorrowful Case they hunger and thirst after a justifying Righteousness, to screen them from deserved Wrath, and to give them a Title to Life. Now the Spirit of GOD brings near this best Robe, and puts it upon them, and enables them to look to, lay hold of, receive, trust in, and enjoy the Comfort of it.

THE Doctrine of free Justification by the imputed Righteousness of CHRIST, has a sweet and powerful Influence upon the Minds of them to whom it comes, not in Word only

only, but in Power, in the HOLY GHOST, and in much Assurance; who receive it in the Love of it. They have, more or less, Peace with GOD; that Peace which passeth all Understanding, which the World can neither give nor take away. Thus in the lively Views of this glorious Truth, the Believer is filled with Love, Admiration and Praise. This does not destroy Duty, nor render it unnecessary, nor make void the Law as a Rule of Walk and Conversation, *Rom. iii. 31.* But on the Contrary, Faith's Views of the Redeemer's Righteousness greatly enlarge the Heart in Duty, enable the Believer to run in the Ways of GOD's Commandments with holy Pleasure and Delight, give Freedom of Access to GOD, and a becoming Boldness to plead with him at the Throne of his Grace. A Sight of the Saviour's Obedience affords the noblest Support under Desertion, Temptation, and Affliction. If a poor Believer can but discover his LORD's Righteousness, and by Faith lay hold upon it; he finds a Stay to his Soul, on which he can safely rest. In the Views of his approaching Dissolution, and of an opening Eternity, when he is about to leave all his earthly Comforts, and to appear before a just and holy GOD; if the Believer can then have a View by Faith of the Redeemer's Righteousness, and feel this Truth warm upon his Heart, he can then sing; *O! Death! where is thy sting? O! Grave! where is thy Victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!* This is the Ground of his Plea, the Support of his Hope; and the Spring of his Consolation; and, therefore, he desires to make mention of it, *Psal. lxxi. 16.*

FURTHER, Brethren, we would have you consider the Connection which this glorious Truth has with other Doctrines of the Gospel. The whole Scheme of the Gospel is closely connected together, like so many Links in a Chain; of which this is a considerable Part, *Rom. viii. 30.* and if this be taken away, the golden Chain of Gospel-Truths is broken, and must run into Confusion. For as the learned *Hutius* observes, "The Doctrine of Justification diffuseth itself through the whole Body of Divinity; and if the Foundation here is well laid, the whole Building will be more solid and grand. Whereas, a bad Foundation, threatens a dreadful Ruin." And most true it is, that the Doctrines of Election, Redemption, effectual Calling, Sanctification



Sanctification, and Perseverance, would not be sufficient to support the Hope of a poor, guilty, law-condemned Sinner, without the Doctrine of ~~free~~ Justification by the imputed Righteousness of CHRIST. Mr *Hervey* observes, "Concerning the Imputation of our Sins to CHRIST, and the Imputation of CHRIST's Righteousness to us, on these two Doctrines hang all the Privileges, and the whole Glory of the Gospel." Certain it is, that only righteous Persons will enter into the Enjoyment of eternal Life. None will be accounted and declared such by the sovereign Judge, but they who are made so by the Righteousness of CHRIST imputed to them. And they who are made Righteous, by the Imputation of CHRIST's Righteousness, are the Chosen of God, the Redeemed of the LAMB; who are called in Time, with an holy Calling, and made meet to be Partakers of the heavenly Inheritance. These enjoy the Earnest of it here, and will be put into the full Possession of it, when they have finished their Course, run their Race, completed their Warfare, and put off these earthly Tabernacles. They will then enjoy all the Benefits of the Redeemer's Righteousness, and sweetly sing of that Grace, which is displayed in their Justification by it. Seeing then, Brethren, that this Doctrine is of such Importance, be careful that you hold it fast, and in its Purity, with all other Truths in the Bible. Think much upon the Grace and Wisdom of God, which shine forth gloriously in it, and calls for our unfeigned Love, warmest Zeal, and constant Obedience. Be careful, Brethren, that you do not give Occasion to the Enemies of this Truth to speak Evil of it. Let your Conversation be as becomes the Gospel in general, and this Truth in particular. We conclude, wishing you an Increase of Grace, spiritual Knowledge, and Understanding, in the Things of God; that ye may approve Things that are Excellent, that ye may be Sincere and without Offence, till the Day of CHRIST; being filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST, unto the Glory and Praise of God.

Signed on behalf of the BRETHREN, by

JOHN GILL, MODERATOR.

## B R E V I A T E S.

*June 1.* In the Evening we met for Prayer and Reading the Letters from the Churches. Next Morning we met at Six o'Clock for Prayer and other Business. The same Day, the public Meeting began about Ten o'Clock; Brother *Evans* preached from 2 Cor. i. 24. *Not for that we have Dominion over your Faith, but are Helpers of your Joy; for by Faith ye stand:* And Brother *Hall* from, Heb. xi. 1. *Now Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not seen.* In the Evening, Brother *Martin* preached from 1 John i. 7. *And the Blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all Sin.* Next Morning we met at Six o'Clock, for Prayer and communicating, as Ministers, our Experiences to each other; which we find very useful. The same Day, at Ten o'Clock, we met again to hear the General Letter, and other Business. Agreed to observe *Wednesday* the 13th of *October*, as a Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer; and hope that as many Churches as it will suit, will unite with us in it. Agreed to hold the next Association at *Carleton* in *Bedfordshire*, on *Wednesday* the 8th of *June* 1774. Ministers and Messengers to meet the Evening before, Ministers to preach, Mr *Ryland* and Mr *Hall*; in Case of Failure Mr *Moreton* and Mr *Martin*.

Added to the Churches  
of this Association, - 76

} Note, Two of these were Persons restored; one received by Dismissal.

Diminished, - - - 35

} Note, Nineteen of these are Dead, Six dismissed, Ten excluded.

Increase, - - - 43



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